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Preparation of School Library Media Specialists in the United States

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Recruiting and preparing the next generation of school library media specialists (SLMSs) is a growing concern nationwide. School library media preparation programs are critical to meeting the current shortage of SLMSs in the United States. To determine the status of professional preparation programs for SLMSs, surveys were sent to forty-eight American Library Association (ALA)-accredited library education programs and 155 programs that prepare SLMSs but are not accredited by the ALA. Specifics related to the percentages of students and faculty in this specialization, the full- and part-time status of students, and the numbers of students enrolled were addressed in this survey. The survey further sought to determine the status of distance education opportunities, the internship as part of the school-media curriculum, and recruitment efforts of school library media preparation programs, school districts, state departments of education, and professional organizations.

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The shortage of school library media specialists (SLMSs) in many parts of the country is becoming a critical concern to school districts, library professional organizations, and colleges and universities with preparation programs for school library professionals. The "graying" of the profession means that approximately one third of SLMSs employed in 1993 will reach retirement age by 2005 (National Center for Education Statistics 1988). Other factors contributing to the shortage include limited access to library education programs, a relatively small pool of qualified candidates, and increasingly rigorous certification requirements (Everhart 2000). This concern has been aired in both the professional and popular press (Lord 2000; Mulik 2001).

Other issues related to the preparation of professionals who staff school library media centers include whether or not SLMSs should be required to have classroom teaching experience, whether preparation should be at the undergraduate or graduate level, and whether prospective SLMSs should be required to earn a master's degree in library science or information studies. Latrobe and Lester (1998) identified the following three additional themes related to school librarianship that have challenged library educators throughout the twentieth century and ones they claim remain unresolved:

- appropriate location for educational programs for SLMSs;
- differences and similarities of preparation programs for school and children's public librarians; and
- balance between standards for both the teaching and library professions.

SLMSs are trained on both the undergraduate and graduate level in a variety of preparation programs in colleges and universities around the country. In most of the forty-eight American Library Association (ALA)-accredited master's-level library and information science programs in the United States, school library media is one career option or track among many others. Programs not accredited by the ALA are most often found in departments or colleges of education and usually focus exclusively on the preparation of SLMSs. Determining the exact number and location of these programs was one purpose of the project described in this article.

National standards for library media programs in K–12 schools were published by the American Association of School Librarians (AASL) and the Association of Educational Communications and Technology (AECT) in 1988. These guidelines called for graduate-level education for SLMSs and set standards for staffing library media centers. In 1989 AASL and the National Council for the Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE) partnered to develop standards for accrediting SLMS preparation programs. *Curriculum Folio Guidelines for the NCATE Review Process: School Library Media Specialist Basic Preparation* was first approved by the NCATE Specialty Board in 1988; a revised version was approved in 1993 (ALA/AASL 1988, 1994). This document contains sixty-seven competencies organized into ten categories (professionalism, management, communication and group dynamics, collection management, collection utilization, production management, organization, administration, instructional leadership, and school library media program development) that guide evaluation of school library media preparation programs. The ALA/NCATE partnership has given ALA and AASL a role in determining the content of SLMS preparation within teacher education programs.

In 1998 revised national guidelines for school library media programs were published. *Information Power: Building Partnerships for Learning* focuses on authentic student learning and creation of a community of lifelong learners (AASL and AECT 1998). NCATE and ALA/AASL revised their accreditation standards for school library media preparation programs to reflect changes in the profession and the new national guidelines for school library media programs. This document, *ALA/AASL Standards for Initial Programs for School Library Media Specialist Preparation*, was approved by NCATE on March 5, 2003 (ALA/AASL 2003). (Please note, too, that AECT in partnership with NCATE has developed standards for accreditation of educational technology preparation programs, some of which prepare SLMSs [AECT 2000]).

The growing concern for recruiting and preparing SLMSs and the declining number of preparation programs nationwide led to the study described here. For many prospective SLMSs in the United States, there is no preparation program within commuting distance. For this reason, distance education programs are vital to preparation of sufficient numbers of SLMSs. Although there is an increasing number of distance education programs, including those offered completely online, it is unclear if these programs will be able to prepare enough SLMSs to meet the projected need. A majority of students who pursue school librarianship are part-time students who have full-time jobs. Arranging field experiences, internships, and practica for these students presents challenges. At the same time, NCATE's performance-based accreditation model focuses on outcomes-based evidence that students have mastered standards rather than accepting such input-based evidence as course syllabi or descriptions of activities offered to students (NCATE 2000). This means that completing field experiences and internships in order to have a laboratory setting in which to document accomplishments will be more important for students than ever before.

The specific purposes of this project were to determine the status of: (1) school library media preparation programs in colleges and universities in the United States; (2) distance education opportunities for prospective SLMSs; (3) internships in school library media preparation programs; and (4) activities school library media preparation programs and state education agencies are undertaking to recruit SLMSs. This research updates part of Harada's 1993 research that sought to discover the status of school library media preparation programs in ALA-accredited schools and extends the focus to include programs that prepare SLMSs outside ALA-accredited schools (Harada 1996).

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Method

The first activity of the project was development of a database of preparation programs for SLMSs. The aim was to include all programs (both ALA-accredited and non-ALA-accredited) in the United States that prepare SLMSs for K–12 schools either through degree or certification-only programs. (ALA-accredited programs are NCATE-approved through an agreement between the two organizations. A list of programs that are currently approved by NCATE as a result of participation in the AASL/NCATE process is available on the [AASL Web site](#).) This study was not limited to ALA and NCATE-accredited programs because a number of non-ALA-accredited programs are located in colleges or universities that are either not NCATE-approved or do not choose to participate in the NCATE approval process.

ALA's *Library and Information Studies: Directory of Institutions Offering Accredited Master's Programs* (ALA 1999) was used to identify ALA-accredited programs. Identification of non-ALA-accredited programs was more difficult; there is no agency or institution that maintains a current list of such programs. A number of sources were used to compile the initial database of programs not accredited by the ALA, including the *American Library Directory 1999–2000* (ALA 1999) list of library preparation programs and training courses; a list of school library media preparation programs compiled by Marilyn Shontz (1998), who headed the AASL/NCATE review process from its inception until 1998 (1999); a list of AASL/NCATE-accredited programs obtained from Julie Walker (1999), executive director of AASL; and a list of NCATE-accredited institutions that offer undergraduate programs in school library media obtained from NCATE (Thomas 1999) were used to compile the initial database of programs not accredited by the ALA.

An item at the end of the questionnaire asked respondents to list the names of all other institutions in their state that currently prepare SLMSs. As questionnaires were received, cross-checks were conducted to ensure that programs listed in response to this item were included in the database. If a program was not in the database, it was added and a questionnaire was immediately sent to that college or university.

Two surveys were developed: one for ALA-accredited schools and another for non-ALA-accredited programs. Several questions were included from Harada's 1993 survey of ALA-accredited schools (Harada 1996). Although most of the questions were the same on both versions of the survey, some questions did not apply to ALA-accredited programs and others did not apply to non-ALA-accredited programs (see appendixes [A](#) and [B](#)). As part of the development of the questionnaires, faculty members at the University of South Carolina (USC) School of Library and Information Science reviewed drafts of both surveys. The third draft was sent to one library science faculty member at each of two institutions with ALA-accredited programs and to one faculty member at each of two non-ALA-accredited programs that prepare SLMSs in order to get further feedback on survey items. Both versions of the survey were four-pages long; the questionnaire for ALA-accredited programs contained twenty-seven items and the questionnaire for non-ALA-accredited programs contained twenty-three items.

Cover letters and questionnaires were mailed to forty-eight ALA-accredited programs and 151 non-ALA-accredited programs in the United States in October 1999. A follow-up letter and questionnaire were mailed to nonrespondents in December 1999. The survey question asking for a list of all school media preparation programs in the respondent's state yielded four additional programs not in the database. Therefore, a total of 155 questionnaires were mailed to non-ALA-accredited programs. Completed questionnaires were received through the middle of 2000.

Of the forty-eight ALA-accredited programs surveyed, thirty-two (66.6 percent) returned completed questionnaires. Representatives from seventeen of the 155 non-ALA-accredited programs telephoned, e-mailed, or mailed notification that their institution did not offer a school media preparation program or that their program had closed. Of the remaining 138 questionnaires sent to non-ALA-accredited programs, eighty-five were returned. One was judged unusable because of ambiguous and incomplete answers. The eighty-four usable responses represent a 61.7 percent return rate. Three of the eighty-four respondents indicated that their programs were closing at the end of the 1999–2000 academic year. Those responses are included in the results reported here.

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Findings

Schools, Programs, and Faculty

Of the thirty-two ALA-accredited schools that responded to the survey, thirty (93.7 percent) indicated that they had school library media preparation programs. One respondent answered "no" and another did not answer this question. All thirty-two responding ALA-accredited schools indicated that there were students in their programs who graduated during the 1998-99 academic year and were seeking employment as SLMSs. [Table 1](#) provides a breakdown of the responses to this question. Five of these schools (15.6 percent)

indicated that fewer than 10 percent of their graduates sought jobs as SLMSs and one school reported that between 75 and 100 percent of graduates sought jobs in school library media centers. Twenty-five respondents (78 percent) indicated that between 10 and 50 percent of graduates planned to look for jobs as SLMSs. From this information, one can conclude that it was possible for students to prepare for careers as SLMSs in all thirty-two schools that responded to this survey.

Respondents from non-ALA-accredited programs were asked if the education unit in their college or university was accredited NCATE. Sixty-eight respondents (almost 81 percent) indicated that their education units were accredited by NCATE and sixteen respondents (19 percent) indicated that the education units at their institutions were not NCATE-accredited. ALA and NCATE have a reciprocal agreement that extends NCATE accreditation to those schools that are accredited by ALA.

Respondents were asked to indicate their total number of faculty by checking off ranges (e.g., fewer than five, five to ten, etc.). None of the respondents reported fewer than five or more than twenty-five full-time faculty. ALA-accredited schools were then asked to report the number of full-time faculty concentrating in school library media courses (see [table 2](#)). Three schools reported no full-time faculty in the school library media area. Of those schools, one has hired a full-time faculty member since this survey was completed. There were differences in how this question was interpreted. One respondent who did not answer the question commented that their program was fully integrated. Another respondent, who reported "none," made the same comment. Yet another reported over five faculty specializing in school library media with the explanation that the program was integrated. It can be safely assumed that in most ALA-accredited programs students preparing to become SLMSs are enrolled in courses with students who are preparing for other career paths and that faculty with a background and interest in school librarianship teach core and required or other courses taken by non-school-library-media students. Twenty-four of the thirty-two ALA-accredited schools (75 percent) responding to the survey reported one or two faculty members whose area of specialization is school library media.

All but four of the thirty-two ALA-accredited respondents (87.5 percent) reported the use of adjunct or part-time faculty to teach school library media related courses (see [table 3](#)). Thirteen of the thirty-two schools (40.6 percent) indicated that they use adjuncts or part-time faculty during every academic term. Only three programs (9.4 percent) reported not using such faculty; one respondent replied that the question was not pertinent to their program.

Of the eighty-four non-ALA-accredited programs that responded to the survey, sixty-nine (82.1 percent) indicated that they offered graduate-level preparation programs and thirty-two (38.1 percent) offered programs at the undergraduate level. Of those sixty-nine programs, fifty-two programs (62 percent) only offer preparation at the graduate level and fifteen (17.8 percent) only offer undergraduate programs. Seventeen programs (20.2 percent) reported preparation of SLMSs at both the graduate and undergraduate levels (see [table 4](#)). Two of these seventeen programs preparing SLMSs at the undergraduate level only indicated that they were scheduled to close at the end of the 1999–2000 academic year. Another undergraduate-only program commented that their program would become a graduate-only program beginning in fall 2000.

A total of sixty-seven non-ALA-accredited respondents (almost 80 percent) reported having one, two, or no full-time faculty specializing in school library media courses (see [table 5](#)). Because these programs are always part of larger academic units, faculty members often teach students other than those preparing for careers as SLMSs and faculty in other specializations teach courses for those students preparing to be SLMSs. Most of the nineteen programs (22.6 percent) that reported no full-time faculty explained that library staff and adjuncts taught their courses. Library faculty either had part-time responsibilities in the school media preparation program or taught courses as an overload. A number of these respondents also commented that instructors in the education units of their colleges and universities taught some courses.

Because one purpose of the project was to determine the availability of school library preparation programs in the United States, efforts were made to discover whether the fifty-one (non-ALA-accredited) nonrespondents actually offered a school library media preparation program. Graduate students in the University of South Carolina School of Library and Information Science searched the Web for evidence that the nonrespondents were viable school library media preparation programs. Institutions for which this

determination could not be made were contacted by e-mail. Officials at eight of the fifty-one nonresponding colleges or universities confirmed that there were no library preparation programs at their institutions. Of the forty-three remaining nonrespondents, there was evidence of school media programs or school media-related courses at thirty-seven of the colleges or universities. The status of the remaining six programs could not be determined. During the course of this investigation, information related to four new programs that were in the planning stages was also discovered.

Students

Data pertaining to students were collected from ALA-accredited schools in four categories: (1) number of full-time-equivalent (FTE) students currently enrolled; (2) percentage of full-time students in fall 1999, (3) percentage of graduates in the 1998-99 academic year (including summer 1999) who were seeking employment as SLMSs; and (4) percentage of students enrolled in fall 1999 who were interested in SLMS specialization.

The overall enrollment of FTE students in the fall 1999 term ranged from fewer than fifty (two respondents) to more than three hundred students (two respondents). Of the total enrollment, the percentage of full-time students (those enrolled in at least three courses) ranged from less than 10 percent (two schools) to over 76 percent (two schools). The largest number of schools (eleven or 34.4 percent) reported that between 26 and 50 percent of students enrolled were full-time. The number of students interested in careers in school librarianship varied from less than 10 percent (three schools) to more than 50 percent (one school) (see [table 6](#)). The largest number of schools (fifteen or 46.8 percent) reported that between 26 and 50 percent of students enrolled in fall 1999 were pursuing studies in this area.

The total number of 1998-99 academic year graduates ranged from fewer than twenty-five (one school) to more than one hundred graduates (twelve schools). The percentage of 1998-99 graduates working as or seeking positions as SLMSs ranged from 10 percent or less (four schools) to more than 76 percent (one school). The largest number of schools (fifteen or 46.8 percent) reported that 10 to 25 percent of their graduates were seeking positions in this field.

Data were collected from non-ALA-accredited programs in the following categories: (1) number of FTE students currently enrolled; (2) percentage of FTE students in fall 1999; (3) percentage of students who qualified for certification as SLMSs during the 1998-99 academic year; and (4) the percentage of students who qualified for certification and were working as or were looking for positions as SLMSs.

Overall program enrollment of full-time students in the fall 1999 term ranged from fewer than fifty (sixty-one or 72.6 percent) to more than 151 (two or 2.4 percent). Of the total enrollment, the percentage of FTE students (those enrolled in at least three courses) ranged from fewer than 10 percent (fifty-three or 63 percent) to more than 75 percent (three or 3.6 percent).

Of the eighty-four programs that responded to the survey, seventy-three (86.9 percent) reported that fewer than twenty-five students completed programs to qualify for certification as SLMSs during the 1998-99 academic year. The number of students who qualified for certification and the number working as or looking for positions as SLMS were close. Although most of the non-ALA-accredited programs are single purpose academic units that prepare SLMSs, there are a few that also have students who are preparing for jobs in public libraries. In those programs, there are students who are seeking employment in settings other than in K-12 schools.

Certification

Most states require some form of licensure or certification as a requirement for employment as a SLMS. Requirements for certification of SLMSs vary from state to state. (See Thomas and Perritt 2003 for the most recent biennial report on certification of SLMSs published in *School Library Journal*.) Most states also have some form of provisional certification for those who are in the process of qualifying for licensure. Many state departments of education have a process in place for approving or accrediting teacher preparation programs, including preparation programs for prospective SLMSs. State departments of education generally

issue certification to those who complete ALA- or NCATE-accredited or state-approved programs for school librarianship. States may also issue certification based on a list of competencies or courses rather than requiring a degree or completion of an approved or accredited program. Some states require a prospective SLMS to qualify for certification as a classroom teacher; other states also require some classroom teaching experience. Because these issues are fundamental to the preparation of SLMSs, questions related to certification were included in the survey.

Both ALA-accredited and non-ALA-accredited programs were asked whether individuals who do not hold teacher certification can qualify for initial certification as a SLMS at their institution. (In such cases, individuals do not have to hold certification as a classroom teachers before becoming certified as a SLMS.) Responses were almost evenly divided between programs in which students can qualify for an initial teacher certificate as a SLMS and those in which they cannot. Of the thirty-two ALA-accredited schools that responded, fourteen (43.7 percent) answered that students could qualify for initial certification as a SLMS; fifteen (46.8 percent) replied that they could not. Two respondents did not answer the question and one did not understand the question. Of the eighty-four non-ALA-accredited programs that responded, thirty-two answered that students can qualify for certification at the undergraduate level (which was interpreted to mean initial certification) and another seventeen programs that prepare SLMSs at the graduate level indicated that students could qualify for initial certification through their programs. This is potentially an important issue for states that have a critical shortage of SLMSs. The amount of course work necessary to qualify both as a classroom teacher and a SLMS in those states with such requirements may be prohibitive in terms of time and monetary investment for many students.

Internship

Prospective classroom teachers are required to complete student teaching or an internship in order to qualify for licensure in most states. This survey sought to ascertain whether or not this is also the case for prospective SLMSs. Both ALA-accredited and non-ALA-accredited programs were asked whether or not students were required to complete internships (defined as field experience under the supervision of a professional). Respondents were also asked about internship requirements related to the number of contact hours, placement, and visits by university or college faculty.

Of the thirty-two ALA-accredited schools that replied to the survey, twenty-eight (87.5 percent) reported that students were required to complete an internship in order to qualify for certification. Of those, only two schools indicated that fewer than 100 contact hours were required. Most schools (twenty or 62.5 percent) require between 100 and 150 contact hours. Four schools reported that students completed more than 200 hours (see [table 7](#)). Respondents who indicated that an internship was required were asked how many times they made site visits to student interns. Six respondents from ALA-accredited schools reported that student interns were not visited during the internship. (One of those commented that interns were regularly contacted by e-mail.) Of the ALA-accredited schools that require an internship, eleven schools visit interns once, seven schools visit twice, and three schools visit three or more times (see [table 8](#)).

Of the eighty-four non-ALA-accredited programs, seventy-two (85.7 percent) require an internship. Of the twelve (14.3 percent) programs that reported an internship was not currently required, two commented that program requirements would soon change to include an internship. The number of required hours varied. Four programs (4.7 percent) reported fewer than fifty required contact hours. Ten programs (11.9 percent) require more than 200 hours. The largest number of programs (twenty-five or 29.7 percent) reported that between 100 and 150 contact hours were required (see [table 7](#)). Visits to student interns enrolled in non-ALA-accredited programs varied from no visits (six programs) to three or more visits (thirty-four programs) (see [table 8](#)).

The number of preparation programs requiring an internship or field experience for prospective SLMSs appears to be up from programs that required them in the early 1990s. In their national survey to determine the status of field experience in library education, Lyders and Wilson (1991) found that 68 percent of the programs that completed and returned their survey included this requirement. Results of the study reported here indicate that 85 percent of programs responding included this requirement.

A particularly challenging situation with regard to internship placements arises when students are working

full-time while pursuing a school library media preparation program. In some states, individuals who have worked in a school library media setting between one and three years (varies by state) are exempt from the internship requirement. Some preparation programs arrange placements in summer school programs or in year-round schools. Students in other programs negotiate for time away from full-time jobs by using annual leave or comp time. In some cases students must resort to taking an unpaid leave of absence to complete an internship.

Distance Education

Both ALA-accredited schools and non-ALA-accredited programs were asked whether courses required for school library media certification were available through distance education, what percentage of their program was offered through distance education, how distance education courses were delivered, and what proportion of the school media certification program could be completed through distance education courses. Respondents from twenty-one (65.6 percent) ALA-accredited schools and forty-four (52.4 percent) non-ALA-accredited programs indicated that at least some courses were available through distance education options (see [table 9](#)).

Of the twenty-one ALA-accredited schools indicating some distance education offerings of courses required for school media certification, three schools (14.2 percent) indicated that 10 percent of the program or less was available through distance education while eight schools (38.1 percent) reported that their entire program is offered through distance education. Of the forty-four responses from non-ALA-accredited programs with some distance education offerings, twelve programs (27.3 percent) reported that 10 percent or less of its courses were offered through distance education; eleven programs (25 percent) indicated that its entire program is offered through distance education.

The survey included questions about delivery of distance education courses. The following delivery methods were listed: faculty travel to distance site, two-way video and audio, one-way video and two-way audio, Internet, and other. Respondents were asked to list all methods that were used by their schools or programs to delivery distance education courses. Of the twenty-one ALA-accredited respondents who indicated some distance education offerings, two way video and audio was the most frequently reported delivery method (twelve schools or 57.1 percent). Of the forty-four non-ALA-accredited respondents, two way video and audio was most frequently reported (seven programs or 15.9 percent) as a delivery method, closely followed by the Internet (six programs or 13.6 percent). A few respondents offered examples of other methods of delivery, including videotapes, adjuncts at distance sites, and e-mail or correspondence courses (see [table 10](#)).

Single-purpose preparation programs for SLMSs are often small programs with only one or two faculty members who must cover as many as four courses each semester. To find out if such programs might be interested in leasing the rights to use courses through distance education technologies from ALA-accredited schools or NCATE-accredited programs, both versions of the survey included a question asking respondents about this possibility. Of the thirty-two ALA-accredited respondents, seven (21.9 percent) answered "yes," six (18.7 percent) answered "no," and nineteen (59.3 percent) answered "don't know." Of the eighty-four non-ALA-accredited programs responding, twenty-four (28.5 percent) answered "yes," twenty-nine (34 percent) answered "no," and thirty-one (36.9 percent) answered "don't know." Another question asked respondents who answered that they would consider leasing courses which topics they were most interested in securing through some sort of lease arrangement. (See [table 11](#) for a list and a breakdown of preferences.)

Recruitment

Shortages of certified SLMSs are expected in most parts of the country over the next several years as retirement numbers rise. In the January 2002 issue of *School Library Journal*, Ishizuka, Minkel, and St. Lifer (2002) identify lack of qualified applicants for SLMS positions as one of the profession's five most critical challenges of 2002. And in the January 2003 issue of *School Library Journal*, Della Curtis, director of library services for the Baltimore County (Md.) Public Schools identified "recruiting qualified library media specialists" as one of the profession's greatest challenges for 2003 (Whelan 2003). Helen Adams, 2001–

2002 president of AASL, designated recruitment to the profession as one of the top concerns of her presidential year and appointed a task force to make recommendations to the association for attracting more individuals to the profession. One of the task force's final products is a Web page devoted to information for those interested in becoming SLMSs as well as for those who are seeking to recruit individuals into the profession (American Association of School Librarians 2004).

Two questions on these surveys addressed the issue of recruitment. Respondents were asked what their academic units were doing to recruit prospective SLMSs to their programs and whether they knew of efforts by their state departments of education, school districts in their states, or professional organizations to recruit prospective library media specialists.

In response to the question related to the academic unit's recruitment efforts, the most frequently mentioned methods were distribution of brochures and flyers, presentations at conferences, exhibits at both teacher and school library conferences, presentations for college and university education classes, attendance at career fairs, and financial aid offers. Some programs have more formal arrangements through which they partner with school districts in recruiting efforts. Others are able to offer financial aid packages (including fellowships and forgivable loans) directed to prospective SLMSs. In a few places, there are formal arrangements between individual school districts and library education programs to prepare cohorts of students as SLMSs.

Regarding recruitment activities initiated by the state department of education, several respondents reported that their state departments of education were making changes in requirements for certification or licensure in order to encourage classroom teachers and career-changers into the field. This often takes the form of either permission for already certified classroom teachers to assume the job of SLMS before completing a professional preparation program or some sort of alternative route to certification especially for those who have never worked and are not credentialed as classroom teachers.

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Conclusion

The purposes of this investigation were to determine the status of: (1) school library media preparation programs in colleges and universities in the United States; (2) distance education opportunities for prospective SLMSs; (3) the internship in school media preparation programs; and (4) those activities school library media preparation programs and state education agencies are undertaking to recruit SLMSs.

A primary purpose of this investigation was to determine the status of preparation programs for SLMSs in the United States. Programs vary from institution to institution; requirements for certification as a SLMS vary from state to state. All ALA-accredited programs responding to this study indicated that they had students who were either interested in school library media as a career path or were actively seeking employment in school library media centers. Web pages for the sixteen ALA-accredited programs that did not respond to the survey were studied to determine whether a specialty in school media leading to certification as a SLMS was available. Such information was found for ten of the sixteen nonrespondents. The other six were contacted by e-mail or by phone. Four of the six indicated that they offer a specialty in school media. These forty-six programs together with the 121 preparation programs in non-ALA-accredited programs means that there are at least 167 preparation programs for SLMSs in the United States and that there could be as many as 173. This includes both ALA- and non-ALA-accredited programs and programs at both the graduate and undergraduate levels. This represents a serious decline from the more than 200 graduate programs that existed in the late 1980s and the almost 200 available at the beginning of the 1990s (Valentine 1988; Shontz 1993).

From these declining numbers and the appearance of a critical shortage of SLMSs nationwide, distance education opportunities are more important than ever before. More than half of respondents (both ALA- and non-ALA-accredited) to these surveys reported that at least part of their school media certification programs were available through distance education offerings. Eight ALA-accredited programs and eleven non-ALA-accredited programs indicated that the entire school library media preparation program at their

institutions was available through distance education. Such opportunities have the potential to make qualification for certification as a SLMS a possibility for individuals who live in areas of the country without preparation programs nearby and who are unable to relocate. Even though more distance education opportunities are becoming available, many require a summer residency or periodic trips to campus for class sessions. This can prove a hardship for those holding down full-time jobs or with family obligations.

From these declining numbers and the appearance of a critical shortage of SLMSs nationwide, distance education opportunities are more important than ever before. More than half of respondents (from both ALA- and non-ALA-accredited programs) to these surveys reported that at least part of their school media certification program was available through distance education offerings. Eight ALA-accredited programs and eleven non-ALA-accredited programs indicated that the entire school library media preparation program at their institution was available through distance education. Such opportunities have the potential to make qualification for certification as a SLMS a possibility for individuals who live in areas of the country without preparation programs nearby and who are unable to relocate. Even though more distance education opportunities are becoming available, many require a summer residency or periodic trips to campus for class sessions. This can prove a hardship for those holding down full-time jobs or with family obligations.

The overwhelming majority of both ALA- and non-ALA-accredited respondents also indicated that an internship is a requirement of their school library media programs. Preparation programs will face challenges in identifying best practice sites for their students who may be located in other states and in arranging faculty supervision of such internships. Designing meaningful field experiences for part-time students who are working full-time presents another set of challenges.

Recruitment to the profession is a concern on national, state, and local levels. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, more than a quarter of librarians who hold a master's degree will reach the age of sixty-five by 2009. Shortages loom for public, academic, and school libraries over the next several years. ALA President John W. Berry reports that we are facing a "recruitment crisis" (2002, 7). Evidence of the important connection between school libraries and student achievement (Library Research Service 2002) and the national visibility of school libraries (Institute of Museum and Library Studies 2002) highlight the need for state departments of education, school districts, professional associations, and school media preparation programs to join hands in finding ways to recruit and educate the next generation of SLMSs.

Especially important will be identifying, recruiting, and preparing individuals who are willing to work in traditionally underserved areas. Several projects funded by the Institute of Museum and Library Studies (IMLS) hold promise as possible models. For example, the University of Maryland and the District of Columbia Public Schools received an IMLS grant in 2003 to prepare teachers and paraprofessional for positions as SLMSs in the District of Columbia (University of Maryland 2003). Participants will retain their current employment positions, enroll in the University of Maryland's College of Information Studies as part-time students, and be supported in a special mentoring program. A similar program at the University of South Florida will target students who are committed to working as SLMSs in Florida's underserved and ethnically diverse communities (University of South Florida 2003). These projects together with a number of projects funded by IMLS in previous years target classroom teachers or individuals without the required credentials already working in school libraries. Ways to identify and recruit individuals who are not already working in the field of education will also be important.

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